

“Save ‘em, Wash ‘em, Clean ‘em, Squash ‘em”: The Story of the Salt Lake City Minute Women

By Katie Clark Blakesley

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World War II is arguably the most important event of the twentieth century. It changed the lives of countless individuals; those who served overseas and those, like the Utah Minute Women, who remained on the homefront. Although historians have written about the war for more than fifty years, there are still important perspectives and stories to be recounted. Many histories of World War II focus on the experiences of soldiers—combat pilots, prisoners of war, and military officials, very few on the experiences of those on the homefront. Perhaps because the majority of veterans were men, most histories written about the war relate their experiences. Important histories about women in World War II have been written; however, most focus on the history of working women not home front volunteers.

This paper examines the role that the Salt Lake City Minute Women, a group of volunteers, played in the war effort. The activities of the Minute Women as volunteers offer insights into the powerful responses that individuals and communities made to assist in the war effort. A review of the work of the Salt Lake Minute Women helps enhance our understanding of home front life during World War II and the important role of women volunteers during the war.

The responsibilities of the Minute Women were stated clearly in a letter from the War Production Board: “Dear Minute Women: You have been drafted into one of the most important jobs given to women on the home front—that of educating the home owners to their responsibility in this war. Many are prone to think that the responsibility of winning the war belongs to the other person. In the face-to-face contacts on your own block you have an opportunity to correct this attitude and give the women the facts.”¹

Salt Lake City provides an excellent case study for volunteer women throughout the United States because the city had an efficient and active women’s organization, but also because its population

¹ War Production Board, Salt Lake City, to the Minute Women, December 1942, MSS B 149, Utah State Historical Society Collections, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereafter referred to as USHS Collections. This source is a scrapbook compiled by Marion Belnap Kerr, entitled “Salt Lake Minute Women World War 2 Minutes and Some Newspaper Clippings of the Salt Lake City Woman’s Unity War Production Board United States of America June 28, 1942 to January 31, 1946.” Included in the scrapbook are newspaper articles and other clippings, correspondence, meeting minutes, etc.

was typical of many mid-sized American cities during World War II.² The Salt Lake Minute Women were active in a volunteer campaign to persuade residents of Salt Lake City to mobilize and support conservation and salvage activities. According to *Utah Minute Women: World War II, 1942-1945*, the official history of the Utah Minute Women, “The woman who was selected as a leader on her block was called a ‘Minute Woman’ because she stood ready to disseminate information in her area and carry forward a war job any time she was notified.”³ By mobilizing the community and collecting salvage items, the Minute Women strengthened the morale of women at home and helped alleviate war time shortages. The Minute Women organized waste paper drives and collected tin cans, nylon and silk hosiery, scrap metal, rubber, and other needed items.

These volunteers participated in salvage activities to be patriotic, to do their part to help win the war and, at times, because of community pressure. Using a combination of door to door canvassing, newspaper and radio coverage, and posted fliers, Salt Lake Minute Women convinced friends and neighbors of the importance of their work. In doing so, they made a valuable contribution to America’s war effort. Margaret Atwood Herbert, a woman who worked in Salt Lake City and at Bushnell Hospital in Brigham City during the war remembered, “We could never have won that war if there hadn’t been the effort on the home front.”⁴

When news reached the Salt Lake Valley of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Utahns reacted in different ways. Adults and children alike worried about their families, especially sons and brothers, and dreaded the mobilization they knew would come. Helen Hansen, who was twenty years old and living in downtown Salt Lake City on December 7, 1941, recalled: “It was a complete shock. No one expected the Japanese to bomb Pearl Harbor; they just didn’t think it could be done. We didn’t know what to think. The only news we got was the newsreels, and the war was all you heard about.”⁵

² According to the 1940 Census, Salt Lake City had a population of 149,934. Allan Kent Powell, ed., *Utah History Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 437.

³ Grace D. Wahlquist and United States of American War Production Board, Conservation and Salvage Division, *Utah Minute Women, World War II, 1942-1945* (n.p., 1945), 20. *Utah Minute Women* is a general description of the Minute Women’s activities throughout the war. Copies were given to libraries and the Utah State Historical Society.

⁴ Allan Kent Powell, *Utah Remembers World War II* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1991), 175.

⁵ Paul and Helen Hansen, conversation with author, June 9, 2001, Salt Lake City, Utah. Paul was in the service during the war, Helen, his war bride, lived in Salt Lake throughout most of the war.

Within a month of the Pearl Harbor attack, the first national scrap drive was held. Americans across the country took the opportunity to channel their emotional anguish into action by gathering and donating scrap to the war effort. The Conservation and Salvage Division of the War Production Board was created to oversee scrap and salvage drives across the United States. In June 1942 Conservation and Salvage officials in Washington D.C. decided that women should be called to undertake the salvage effort.⁶ The agency's goal was to "select a woman leader on each block in every community in every state."⁷ These leaders would be responsible for administering the salvage program and educating the public on the necessity of salvage. Expressing their confidence in American women government officials wrote: "Women have the heart for getting behind a project and the knack for putting it over—once they understand it and believe in it. Show the ladies the vital need of salvage, what they can do, when and how they can do it and you will create the irresistible drive so essential to the success of this great wartime effort."⁸

In response to orders from Washington, B.L. Wood, War Production Board Executive Secretary for Utah, sent a letter to Salvage Chairmen throughout the state of Utah asking them to help choose female leaders in their town. The women "should be well known in the community, energetic, and be able to get along with people."⁹ The Utah Minute Women were organized under the War Production Board. Utah was the first state to complete its Minute Women organization with a force of 32 county directors, 333 city chairwomen, 8,000 Minute Women, and 5,000 Paper Troopers¹⁰

On July 28, 1942, B.L. Wood chaired the first meeting of the "Woman's Board of the Conservation Division of the War Production Board of Salt Lake City," a group later known as the Salt Lake Minute Women. He called the small group of women in attendance to "special projects of salvage" and gave them an overview of how the program was to run. Grace D. Wahlquist, chairman of the Utah Minute Women, also addressed the group. She outlined a three-step publicity program for the Minute Women:

⁶ Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 14.

⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁸ Bureau of Industrial Conservation, *National Salvage Program*, 8, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

⁹ B.L. Wood to Salvage Chairmen or municipal leaders in Utah, July 9, 1942, as found in Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

radio, press, and personal contact. She also told the women that “all things are at our command to use in this all-out program.”¹¹

Six days later, on August 3, 1942, Grace D. Wahlquist and Bertha S. Stevenson, Salt Lake Minute Women Chairman, met with eight other women, forming the Salt Lake Minute Women Committee. These women were to participate in the day to day aspects of the salvage effort, such as collecting fats and tin cans; however, they also ran the administrative aspect of the salvage effort. It was these women who organized mass meetings, gave radio announcements, organized drives, and coordinated the transport of massive amounts of materials. Minute Women and state and local leaders alike could feel confident in the leaders, all of whom had previously held impressive leadership positions in the community. Prior to her term as Chairman, Grace D. Wahlquist served for seven years as the chair of the Salt Lake Council of Women’s Centennial Committee. Bertha S. Stevenson had been the past president of the Salt Lake County Medical Auxiliary Society as well as past president of the Salt Lake Council of Women, a group of seventy-six civic clubs.¹² Both women were eventually inducted into the Salt Lake Council of Women’s Hall of Fame, along with several other prominent Minute Women.

In addition to prominent leaders, directives from the War Production Board influenced the Minute Women organization. In 1942 the Board issued *The National Salvage Program Official Plan* that suggested different ways to organize local salvage committees. Women were encouraged to utilize existing organizations, such as “Parent-Teacher Associations, Federation of Women’s Clubs, American Legion Auxiliaries. . . . church groups, Home-Economic Extension Units, Girls Scouts, and A.F. of L. women’s representatives.”¹³ Women in these kinds of organizations already had shown an interest in community affairs and were likely candidates for service in the war salvage effort.

A month later, on September 5, the initial organization of the Minute Women was completed. Mrs. Junius Fisher was called to be the organization chairman; she suggested organizing the city into districts along school and political lines. This structure aided in communication and mobilization efforts as

¹¹ Minutes, July 28, 1942, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections. Minutes compiled by Marion Belnap Kerr. Unless otherwise stated, all minutes mentioned in this paper are from the Salt Lake Minute Women meetings and were compiled by Mrs. Kerr. [Hereafter cited as Minutes].

¹² “Club Names Seven to ‘Hall of Fame,’” *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 27, 1953. The Salt Lake Council of Women inducted a handful of women into its Hall of Fame every five years.

women lived in the same general area and were often acquainted with each other through their school children or working together in school, community, church, business, or other activities. Members of the Salt Lake Minute Women Committee were assigned to be district chairmen.¹⁴ Each district chairman was asked to organize a district meeting on September 9, 1942; the local PTA President, LDS Relief Society President, and the Women's Club President were invited. Together, these women suggested names of women as block captains. The district chairman kept an up-to-date map with the number of blocks in her district and the names of the block captains involved. Whenever business warranted, an individual district would meet at the local schoolhouse.¹⁵ As the war progressed, other subsets of women were organized. If the Minute Women leadership wanted to get in touch with the block captains, they would hold captain meetings which were smaller than mass meetings but larger than district meetings.¹⁶ In May 1944 the Salt Lake Minute Women instituted executive board meetings.¹⁷ Mrs. Stevenson and three other women met as the new executive board whenever urgent business arose.

In addition to being district chairmen, each member of the committee had a specific role and was responsible for mobilizing a specific group of women in the community. For example, Marion Belnap Kerr was in charge of publicity and was also the special contact advisor for the Utah Federation of Women's clubs. Other women were designated as special contact advisors for Sugar House, the PTA, the Salt Lake Air Base, Catholic Women's League and all other church organizations except for the Latter-day Saints, the President's Patriotic Defense Council, and the L.D.S. Women's Organizations. Because the Minute Women cooperated closely with existing civic groups, they were able to dedicate their time to salvage activities instead of time consuming social engagements. In addition, they were able to call upon club officers to give announcements and encourage their members to participate in salvage activities. The Minute Women made a point of keeping the PTA, the Utah Federation of Women's Clubs, and the Salt Lake Council of Women updated on their activities.¹⁸

¹³ Bureau of Industrial Conservation, *National Salvage Program*, 8, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

¹⁴ Minutes, September 7, 1942.

¹⁵ Ibid., October 5, 1942.

¹⁶ Ibid., November 1, 1942.

¹⁷ Ibid., May 29, 1944.

¹⁸ Ibid., November 1, 1942.

On September 12, 1942, the Minute Women held their first mass meeting, where they outlined their salvage program.¹⁹ Utah was the first state to organize as directed with a woman on every block. M.J. Greenwood, the Utah Salvage Chairman, and Grace D. Wahlquist, State Chairman, Women's Unit, quickly sent a letter to block leaders that read, "You have been called . . . to participate on the Women's Salvage Committee, which is the most important activity on the home front. . . . You will stand ever ready on the home front to answer any emergency call which is vital to the winning of the war. . . . The work you will do might be the means of saving the lives of your own boys or your immediate family or friends."²⁰ Minute Women were a unique volunteer force. Women in leadership positions were selected and given official letters of appointment because they had previously exhibited the ability to lead. General membership in the Minute Women was not solicited in an open fashion, instead, members were 'hand picked' by leaders such Grace D. Wahlquist.²¹

The Minute Women knew that they could meet government imposed salvage quotas if and only if they encouraged every household in Salt Lake to participate. The wide ranging suggestions given by the national War Production Board indicate that this was a job only for the most dedicated; it wasn't something that could be done half-heartedly or haphazardly. Instead, it took persevering women who spent many hours canvassing neighborhoods, demonstrating in front of department stores, and creating unique propaganda to heighten the community's interest and support.

Minute Women educated their neighbors about new and continuing salvage activities—a duty they took seriously. Grace D. Wahlquist wrote, "This woman was to stand ready to disseminate the correct information on *what* was needed, *why* it was needed, *how* it should be saved and *where* it should be taken in order to be used in the war effort."²² On many occasions, Minute Women were expected to respond to an assignment on a "minute's" notice. They believed that their salvage effort was just as important to the war effort as was the service of soldiers abroad or the work of their fellow men and women in war industries. "[Minute Women] never lost sight of the significant role of salvage in war

¹⁹ Ibid., September 7, 1942.

²⁰ M.J. Greenwood, B.L. Wood, Grace Wahlquist, and L.A. Stevenson to Women of America, 9 September 1942, MSS B 149, USHS Collections.

²¹ Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 20.

²² Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 14.

production, and the constant demands of the battlefields were her statistics; however, she directed and assisted in many other war programs.”²³

Specifically, the Minute Women Block Captains were encouraged to canvass each house in their neighborhood and ask women to sign cards pledging to use only their fair share of food and pay only the established price for food.²⁴ They also explained what was needed, how to save the items, and how to turn them in to the local salvage depot.²⁵ The Committee sponsored lectures given by home economists, women editors, and others as often as possible. All Minute Women were encouraged to demonstrate in houses, town halls, clubs, department stores, schools, and street corners. Finally, and perhaps most effectively, Minute Women passed out pamphlets at department stores and contacted women feature editors, newspapers, radios, and other means to advertise their efforts.²⁶

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²³ Ibid., 20.

²⁴ According to the minutes from October 4, 1943, the Minute Women cooperated with the Office of Price Administration by administering the Home Front Pledge to their neighbors.

²⁵ In Salt Lake City, the local salvage depot was located at 420 West, 800 South, Minutes 3 August 1942, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

²⁶ Bureau of Industrial Conservation, *National Salvage Program*, 8, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

²⁷ Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 14.

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

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The Minute Women used every opportunity to educate their neighborhoods about the importance of salvage. Indicative of the thoroughness of the Minute Women's education efforts is the "Throw Your Scrap into the Fight" flier. It is a checklist of ninety-three different items that could be contributed to the war effort. The list included everything from old irons and radiators, to rubber garters and toys, to old sheets and men's shirts, to rope and burlap bags, "and anything else you can find made out of metal, rubber, cloth, or hemp."³² Most likely, Minute Women distributed this flier to women on their block and posted it in public places. Clearly, the Minute Women wanted their neighborhoods to know that just about anything anyone could provide would be useful to the war effort.

The Salt Lake Minute Women used many different means to contact and persuade their neighbors and to inform their block captains of new programs and meetings. For example, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Deseret News* regularly ran small ads that advertised important meetings. An ad that ran in the *Tribune* on December 4, 1942, read: "Calling All Minute Women. All Salt Lake Minute women are requested to be present at an important mass meeting at South High School Saturday December 5th at 2 p.m. Instructions will be given regarding special work to be done immediately that we may properly 'Remember Pearl Harbor' on December 7."

To inform Minute Women of upcoming events, it was customary to have a mass meeting/ pep rally. All Minute Women were invited to attend—district chairmen, block captains, and everyday

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³¹ Bureau of Industrial Conservation, *National Salvage Program*, 8, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

³² MSS A 1821, USHS Collections. Included in this collection are many charts, fliers, posters, pamphlets, and other items, many of which are referred to in this paper. In the majority of cases, there is no publication information.

volunteers. Minute Women would salute the flag, sing a patriotic song, and distribute literature.³³ Guest lecturers spoke about the importance of their work. Women were counseled that “business as usual” and “living normally” would not be possible for the remainder of the war. A statement by Dr. Dilworth Walker, chairman of War Services for Salt Lake City, at one 1942 rally made clear the critical nature of their work as he admonished the women, “War, if won, will be won by men on the front, if lost, will be lost on the homefront.”³⁴

The Minute Women also relied on the strong pro-war sentiments of local and national newspapers and radio stations. In some cases they used catchy, albeit racist statements, such as “Load guns that’ll lick the Japs by saving all your kitchen fats.”³⁵ Patriotic newspaper articles furthered the Salt Lake Minute Women’s cause. On Sunday, September 13, 1942, the *Salt Lake Tribune* ran a front page article and picture concerning the scrap drive that was to take place and making clear that every one should participate: “Uncle Sam is worried. He must find more scrap metal . . . so that the nation’s armed forces will have the steel to fight the Jap and the nazi. That’s why Uncle Sam, on his knees, has asked Salt Lake City to dig out every piece of metal . . . each home in Salt Lake is expected to produce 100 pounds of metal.”

These efforts to rally support for the salvage activities were not in vain. People did respond to the calls for help. Some donated their scrap materials because it was convenient. However, most could see that their tin, fats, or other scraps would be made into tangible weapons.

One of the Minute Women’s first salvage efforts included a program to salvage household fats launched in 1942. To advertise the fats salvage drive the Minute Women distributed charts to members of the community. One chart showed that one tank car full of fats, or 60,000 pounds of fat, could make 6,000 pounds of glycerine. This in turn could be transformed into nitroglycerine for 240,000 anti-aircraft shells, alkyd resin paint for 1,200 medium tanks, 30,000 pounds of dynamite, or annual pharmaceutical

³³ For example, Bertha S. Stevenson presided at a mass meeting held on June 25, 1943, at the Capitol Theatre. Mrs. Grant Gregerson led the group in saluting the flag; they then sang the Star Spangled Banner.

³⁴ Minutes, December 5, 1942, MSSA 1821, USHS Collections.

³⁵ Clipping, MSS B 149, USHS Collections.

supplies for 2,000 hospital beds.³⁶ The majority of the charts and fliers distributed by the Minute Women showed exactly how the contribution of a needed war material could help in the war effort.

The Minute Women, through newspaper articles and other publicity means, rallied their neighborhoods to participation in the national Pearl Harbor Fats Collection Day on December 7, 1942.³⁷ No doubt memories of the Japanese attack were still fresh in many Americans' minds and this was a tangible way they could remember Pearl Harbor while contributing goods that could be turned into weapons to help defeat the enemy.

The household fats salvage program was efficient and successful in Utah, as the state ranked fifth in the nation in 1942 for fats collections on a per capita basis.³⁸ There are many possible reasons for the success of the household fats collection program. Joan Anderson, a Utah native, remembered that her family was already saving fats to make soap. Because they were in the habit of saving the fat, it was easy to turn it in to help the war effort.³⁹ Perhaps the fats program was so successful because women knew exactly how their contribution would be used to hurt the enemy. It was also relatively convenient. Instead of transporting big, bulky scrap metal or washing out tin cans, removing labels, and crushing them, women could deposit their fats with their local butcher on their regular visits.

Minute Women capitalized on this mindset and used poignant pictures or stirring statements to encourage women to contribute to the salvage effort. This was the case with the nationwide effort to salvage tin which began in 1942. In a letter to the Minute Women of Salt Lake City, L. A. Stevenson outlined several items for which salvaged tin cans could be used. "1. There is enough tin in 3 salvaged cans to make a *Hand Grenade*. 2. *One tin can*_ yields enough tin for a pair of *Binoculars*_. 3. A family of four saving its tin cans for two weeks will save sufficient tin to supply this metal for a portable *flame thrower*. 4. A month's savings of cans will make the bushings for *3 machine guns*. Save 'em, Wash 'em, Clean 'em, Squash 'em."⁴⁰

³⁶ Chart Showing Fats Usage, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

³⁷ Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁹ Joan Anderson, conversation with author, June 12, 2001, Salt Lake City, Utah. Joan Anderson was a young teenager living in Salt Lake during World War II.

⁴⁰ Mrs. L.A. [Bertha S] Stevenson and Salt Lake Committee to The Minute Women of Salt Lake City, March 1943, MSS B 149, USHS Collections. Emphasis in original.

Tin was also used to make the life saving morphine filled syrette (a tiny syringe). A flier distributed by Utah Minute Women entitled "Tin Needed For War," showed a syrette that contained "one dose of anesthetic, which will relieve the shock of a severe wound and may save the life of an American fighter."⁴¹

Many times Minute Women either created or distributed fliers with catchy sayings or poignant pictures. In the case of the tin drives, they were very aware that they could use pictures as propaganda to appeal emotionally to their fellow women to support the salvage effort. For a woman whose son, husband, or boy friend was serving overseas, a picture of a valiant nurse injecting morphine into a dying soldier might make her stop and think that the soldier could be her loved one. With this kind of effective emotional appeal, women were more likely to save their tin cans.

Local department stores supported the tin drives. In the fall of 1942, J.C. Penney and five other department stores allowed Minute Women to set up publicity booths outside their stores for a week. Minute Women sat at the booths and passed out literature concerning proper tin can salvage. According to Bertha S. Stevenson in a letter to O. S. Evans, assistant manager of J.C. Penney, "through the medium of these booths, thousands of women were shown how to preserve and conserve this metal so vital to the war effort of our country."⁴² ZCMI, the Auerbach Company, the Paris Company, and Sears Roebuck & Company were among the participating stores. These booths were a constant reminder to women going about their everyday business of the importance of salvage.

Schools in Salt Lake City and Ogden became involved in tin can drives in 1943.⁴³ Lowell Elementary School in Salt Lake City let students out an hour and a half early on tin can days to collect cans. In some areas, school principals encouraged contests among their rooms to help foster tin can collection.⁴⁴ Because children were given incentives at school, they encouraged their mothers to save cans for them.

⁴¹ Utah Minute Women, Salvage Division, War Production Board, "Tin Needed For War" (flier), MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

⁴² Mrs. L.A. [Bertha S.] Stevenson to Mr. O.S. Evans, Assistant Manager, J.C. Penney, November 12, 1942, USHS Collection MSS B 149. Also found in minutes for the November 9, 1942, meeting.

⁴³ Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 25.

⁴⁴ Minutes, February 1943, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections. A representative from District 1, which covered from Main Street to 13th East and 6th to 17th South reported to the Committee about the successes of principals encouraging tin can class competitions.

Housewives began taking tin cans to grocery stores in May 1944. In more rural areas of Utah, many transportation companies hauled tin cans long distances to shipping points in Salt Lake City and Ogden free of charge. In addition, railroads reduced rates from eight dollars a ton to four dollars a ton: this made it feasible to ship the collected tin to the Metal and Thermit Detinning Plant in South San Francisco.⁴⁵ In most cases Minute Women covered the shipping costs with the money they received for the cans. For example, the Pepper Metal and Supply Company paid four dollars a ton for tin cans; it cost almost the same to ship them. The money received also was used to pay for expenses such as newspaper and radio ads, fliers, posters, and meals for volunteers during salvage drives.⁴⁶ If any profits remained at the end of the war, they were to "...be used for worthy war programs or civic charities."⁴⁷

In 1942 and 1943 silk and nylon hosiery became a hot commodity in the salvage effort. Salt Lake Minute Women tried to convince women to donate their hosiery for the war effort. Minute Women explained that silk was used to make powder bags and nylon was used in parachutes, flares, and other war time materials. As with the tin can drive, Salt Lake Minute Women placed hosiery collection containers in dry goods and department stores, often at the hosiery counter.

For many women, giving up comforts such as silk and nylon hose demonstrated their dedication to winning the war. Thirteen year-old Dolores Oswald, a Salt Lake City resident, had planned to weave a rug from 780 silk stockings she had collected before the war began. Instead, she donated them to the war effort "hoping they would weave a web around Tokio [sic]."⁴⁸ Helen Hansen remembers, "Stockings were like gold. If you had a pair of stockings you were in good shape. I remember darning a run in a pair [of nylons] because there weren't any more to buy." She also commented that because everyone had runs or holes in their nylons, people didn't really notice or care if your nylons were in disrepair. If you didn't have stockings, you just went without.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Historian Jessie L. Embry wrote that tin cans were an exception to the salvage collections because "the nearest 'detinning' plant was in San Francisco, and there was no way to ship scrap that far." "The Utah Homefront During World War II," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 63, (Summer 1995): 259. However, a careful study of newspaper articles and Salt Lake Minute Women meeting minutes shows that this was not the case. Utah women collected 6,557,968 pounds of tin during World War II. See also minutes, March 2, 1943, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

⁴⁶ Minutes, October 5, 1942, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

⁴⁷ Minutes, December 6, 1944, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

⁴⁸ MSS B 149, USHS Collections.

⁴⁹ Hansen Interview, June 9, 2001.

A special "Silk and Nylon Hosiery Day in Utah" was designated for May 23, 1943. Women who turned in five pairs of nylons were given a free movie ticket.⁵⁰ By June 7, a total of 1,575 picture show tickets were distributed in exchange for hose. The collection totaled 135,000 pair of hose that weighted 1,790 pounds.⁵¹ For some, conveniently placed collection bins prompted them to donate their hose; others were, no doubt, encouraged by free show tickets. By the time the hosiery program was terminated on November 30, 1943, Utah women had collected and shipped 19,527 pounds of silk and nylon hosiery.⁵²

Utah Minute Women tried to involve their entire neighborhoods in their volunteer salvage crusade. During the waste paper salvage campaign Utah Minute Women followed up a national radio campaign by recruiting children and teenagers to participate in collecting efforts in their neighborhoods.

On June 1, 1944, Salt Lake Minute Women were informed that they had been selected as one of a hundred cities to officially include children in the war effort. The children were organized as Paper Troopers under the direction of the Minute Women. Their duties included delivering hand bills, contacting homes, and assisting the Minute Women in any way possible. During waste paper drives, the Paper Troopers helped tie, move, and collect paper bundles on each block.⁵³ The Utah Minute Women invited more than 5,000 children to become affiliated with the War Production Board and made it official by presenting them with colorful Paper Trooper emblems. In September 1945 between 1,500 to 2,000 Paper Troopers who had collected two thousand pounds of waste paper were given a hexagonal felt patch that read, "Paper Trooper Distinguished Service Award: War Production Board, 2000 pounds."⁵⁴ In addition, Paper Troopers were awarded embroidered "battle bar" patches for participating in paper campaigns with the names of European, Marshalls, Saipan, Philippines, and Iwo Jima.⁵⁵ Boy Scouts who collected one thousand pounds of waste paper were given the prestigious Eisenhower medal. In order to reach this goal, the Boy Scouts went door to door collecting waste paper bundles which were transported by Army and volunteer trucks.⁵⁶ Minute Women's publicity campaigns, incentives, and persistent organizing of salvage drives made participation in the collecting activities an accepted, even

⁵⁰ Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 24.

⁵¹ Minutes, June 7, 1943, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

⁵² *Official Salvage News Bulletin*, January 1944. MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

desirous endeavor. With Paper Troopers involved in the collecting activities, Minute Women had more time to organize and administer the extensive and varied collection initiatives.

The following chart shows the amount of scrap metal, waste paper, tin cans, and household fats that the Utah Minute Women collected during the War.

Minute Women Salvage Collections, 1942-1945

	1942	1943	1944	1945 (8 mo.)	Total
Scrap Iron & Steel	84,000,000	84,499,929	48,966,344	24,542,700	242,008,973
Waste Paper	7,560,000	666,194	20,328,000	18,024,000	46,578,194
Tin Cans	268,000	2,085,895	2,707,091	1,497,000	6,557,968
Household Fats	114,836	714,193	865,130	568,379	2,262,538

Chart adapted from "Tabulation of Utah's Salvage Reports." *Utah Minute Women*, 36. All measurements in pounds.

The four types of salvage materials listed above generated the majority of the more than 300 million pounds of salvage material that was collected in Utah during the war. This massive amount of material is even more extraordinary considering the women who collected the material were not paid for their time or effort. And yet, eight thousand Utah women participated as Minute Women to do their part.

By the end of 1944, Utahns had collected 1,694,159 pounds of fats. If all of the fats collected in Utah had gone towards alkyd resin paint, the fats would have produced enough paint for 33,600 tanks or approximately 38 percent of all tanks produced in the United States up to 1944.⁵⁷ To further illustrate the enormity of the Minute Women's salvage efforts of household fats, 2,262,538 pounds of fats were

⁵³ Grace D. Wahlquist and L.A.[Bertha S.] Stevenson to Salt Lake Minute Women, July 1, 1944, MSS B 149, 205, USHS Collections.

⁵⁴ Paper Trooper Distinguished Service Award: War Production Board, 2000 pounds," (patch, hexagonal), "European," "Marshalls," "Saipan," "Philippines," "Iwo Jima," (four smaller, rectangular patches pinned under the "paper trooper" patch), MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

⁵⁵ "Boys, Girls to Receive Awards for Paper Drives." *Deseret News*, September 10, 1945.

⁵⁶ Mrs. L.A. [Bertha S.] Stevenson to Salt Lake City Minute Women, March 16, 1945, MSS B 149, USHS Collections.

⁵⁷ By the end of 1944, American industry had produced 88,140 tanks. See C. L. Sulzberger, *American Heritage New History of World War II*, revised and updated by Stephen Ambrose (New York: Penguin, 1997), 227.

collected between 1942 and 1945. This large amount of fats was translated into any one of the following uses: alkyd resin paint for 45,600 medium tanks; or, 1,140,000 pounds of dynamite; or, 9,120,000 anti-aircraft shells; or annual pharmaceutical supplies for 76,000 hospital beds⁵⁸

The Minute Women's publicity efforts were equally impressive. They distributed more than one million pieces of educational material, mailed a quarter million letters, displayed thousands of posters in public places, and donated more than fifty million hours of volunteer service. The Minute Women contributed significantly to the war effort.⁵⁹

In many ways, the Minute Women reached their goal to involve everyone in the salvage effort. The Minute Women had the support of the media. "Loyal reporters from the *Salt Lake Tribune*, *Salt Lake Telegram*, and *Deseret News* called at the State Salvage Office practically every day during the three and one-half years it was maintained by the War Production Board."⁶⁰ Radio stations, theaters, Utah schools, Girl and Boy Scouts, and many other organizations assisted in the publicity, collection, distribution, and transportation of salvage materials. Almost every business or industry was directly involved in the salvage program. Grace Wahlquist reported that: "grocery stores collected tin cans; beverage companies . . . hauled the cans to shipping points....dry cleaning establishments cleaned clothing in Old Clothing Drives; drug stores collected tin tubes; garages and service stations collected scrap iron and rubber; dry goods stores collected silk and nylon hosiery; and, all industries and business houses collected scrap iron and waste paper."⁶¹

Their efforts did make a difference and were recognized at the end of the war. Ralph E. Bristol, District Manager for the War Production Board, wrote to Grace D. Wahlquist: "There has been no group that I know of engaged in war work with the War Production Board that even begins to match the superlative performance and wonderful results obtained by our Minute Women under your leadership, Mrs. Wahlquist."⁶²

⁵⁸ The figures were extrapolated from the previously cited Chart Showing Fats Usage, MSS A1821, USHS Collections. The chart showed that 60,000 pounds of fat equaled one tank full of fat, which equaled 6,000 pounds of nitroglycerine. This computes to almost thirty-eight tanks of fat.

⁵⁹ Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 54, 37.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶² Ralph E. Bristol, District Manager, War Production Board, to Mrs. Grace Wahlquist, Chairman, Minute Women of Utah, September 14, 1945. Minute Women, 60.

Accolades such as the one from Bristol show that the Minute Women were dedicated and very good at what they did. However, they do little to tell us why women would put their heart and soul into a volunteer activity. At a mass meeting attended by a thousand Minute Women, Genet P. Garner compared the women to their patriotic ancestors in the days of the American Revolution: "America is no stronger than her women. The spirit of 1942 and the Minute Women of 1942 are the same as the spirit and the women of 1776. Women will retain the freedom of the men of 1776, scrap must be collected before the snow flies. America is no stronger than her Minute Women." At the same meeting, Utah women were counseled that they must help "recover the Holy Grail of Freedom . . . the Women of America must prove to be the second line of heroes."⁶³ Other statements at many of the mass meetings were similar to those of Genet Garner. By participating in the salvage effort, Minute Women saw their contribution to the war effort as very significant. Americans look upon the Revolutionary War as a gathering of heroes, brave men and women fighting, sometimes even giving their lives to oppose tyranny. Minute Women saw themselves in the same light—they were defending their nation's liberty by collecting much needed salvage material collection instead of using the sword.

Many of the women participated in home front drives because they felt it was their duty. When asked why she participated in salvage programs, Dorothy Burton said, "You just did. You felt a sense of duty to help your country, so you did everything you could."⁶⁴

Minute Women did more than just collect materials for the war effort. On September 12, 1945, the Salt Lake Minute Women donated two thousand books for the wounded soldiers who were being treated at Bushnell Hospital in Brigham City. The books were purchased with proceeds of a Double V (standing for Victory and Veterans) waste paper drive held July 1945.⁶⁵ Included with the books was a placard showing a majestic, patriotic, and elegant looking woman—a fitting representative of the Minute Women, their motivation and contribution to the war.⁶⁶

⁶³ Minutes, September 12, 1942, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

⁶⁴ Dorothy Burton, conversation with author, June 12, 2001, Salt Lake City, Utah. Dorothy was in her twenties during the war and lived and worked in Salt Lake City.

⁶⁵ Program, MSS A 1821, USHS Collections.

⁶⁶ "Presented to Men of Bushnell by the Utah Minute Women and the Salt Lake Tribune and Telegram," (card) September 12, 1945, USHS Collection MSS A 1821.

The Salt Lake Minute Women were disbanded on January 31, 1946, less than five months after the formal surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945. The women helped ease the transition from wartime to peace, in part because there were still shortages that were associated with the war.

Utah's Minute Women received commendations from almost every corner. The state legislature issued a joint resolution "commending and congratulating the Utah Salvage Committee on a very outstanding Record of Accomplishment."⁶⁷ Governor Herbert Maw wrote: "The success of your labors, undoubtedly, was a major factor in bringing victory to our side, for at no time were our fighting men left wanting."⁶⁸ In a letter to Grace D. Wahlquist, M.J. Greenwood, state salvage chairman, thanked the Minute Women for their "outstanding and gratifying" results in their salvage efforts.⁶⁹ F.G. Jamison, a regional manager for the Conservation and Salvage Division of the War Production Board wrote, "Utah's fighting sons can be rightfully proud of your homefront achievements, and the magnificent contribution you have made to the winning of the war."⁷⁰

Although the Salt Lake Minute Women were one of the best organized groups, there were women's salvage divisions across the country that also contributed their time, talents, and leadership skills to make a difference on the homefront. Perhaps without the Minute Women, there would not have been any Rosie the Riveters. The volunteer female homefront armies contributed greatly to the morale of those on the homefront as well as to the success of the war. It is time they took their place in history as the heroes that they were.

⁶⁷ H.J.R. No. 10, in Wahlquist, *Utah Minute Women*, 56.

⁶⁸ September 30, 1945, in *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁹ September 17, 1945, in *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁰ F. G. Jamison, Regional Manager, Conservation and Salvage Division to the Utah Minute Women, Denver, September 5, 1945, in *Ibid.*, 59.